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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005912

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA A/S BURNS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [MEPP](#)

SUBJECT: DEFUSING JORDAN'S GROWING FEAR OF TRANSFER

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Over the past few weeks, many Jordanians of all political stripes have become deeply afraid that Israel -- and specifically PM Sharon personally -- will exploit a U.S. attack on Iraq to forcibly transfer large numbers of Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan. Senior officials, media personalities, academicians, and average Jordanians alike have raised -- on occasions too numerous to count -- this possibility with us.

2. (C) FonMin Muasher raised his growing concern about transfer to the Ambassador recently, something he said he never imagined he could consider a realistic possibility even a few weeks ago. He said he raised his concerns directly with the Israelis three weeks ago in the U.S. and received verbal assurances. His alarm has risen precisely because he asked that the Israelis state these assurances publicly and they have not. Professor Ibrihim Badran, Assistant President of Philadelphia University, told PolOff October 1 that transfer had become a dominant topic of discussion on campus: "People are asking how can the U.S. be totally insensitive to what hurts Jordan, endangers Jordan? It is difficult to understand." Abdulkarim Abulhaija, Director-General of the GOJ's Department of Palestinian Affairs told Refcoord October 9 that "everyone believes this is a credible fear because we see the U.S. giving Israel the green light to do whatever it wants."

3. (C) The Jordanian press has both fed and reflected these fears. On September 29, Sa'ad Kan'an stated in an editorial in Al-Arab Al-Yawm "The transfer is coming . . . this, simply put, is Sharon's strategy." On September 30, Uraib al-Rantawi, prominent columnist, wrote in Al-Dustour "for us in Jordan, the word "transfer" evokes the specter of the conspiracy that aims against the whole nation and places the danger (to Jordan) on an existential level." And, on October 1, Rakan Al-Majali echoed the same fear that "Israel will exploit the strike against Iraq to carry out the transfer, which has long been a constant dream of Ariel Sharon." Reflecting a fear held by some East Bank Jordanians, Abdullah Abu Romman, Editor of the East Bank Nationalist Al-Mira'a, told IO that the chaos of war with Iraq will open the way for Sharon to flood Jordan "once and for all" with Palestinians, bringing about the end of the traditional East Bank Hashemite order.

4. (C) In our estimation, a scenario leading to mass expulsion seems remote at best, and we have sought to reassure our Jordanian interlocutors on this score. Nevertheless, whether grounded in logical analysis or simple emotion, the fear Jordanians are expressing to us is real. For them, "transfer" would constitute the worst aspect of a host of calamities (including but not limited to Iraqi refugees coming from the east, a cut off of oil, economic dislocation, domestic unrest, WMD-tipped SCUDS shot down over Amman, and terrorist attacks) they imagine befalling the Kingdom in the wake of U.S. military operations against Saddam. Relief agency, UN and GOJ officials all note that no one in Jordan would be physically or financially able to deal with a new influx of Palestinians.

5. (C) To a large degree, Jordanian fears about the consequences of a military conflict between the U.S. and Iraq stem from a profound sense of powerlessness. They believe they can do little to influence the decisions of Saddam Hussein, Ariel Sharon, or, for that matter, President Bush, and at the same time are more convinced than ever that Jordan, in the end, will suffer the most.

6. (C) While it is impossible for the U.S. to address fully all aspects of Jordan's pre-war jitters, we believe there are steps the U.S. can take to dampen these fears on the issue of transfer. We believe a private message to the Israelis strongly urging them to state clearly that they have no intention of expelling Palestinians to Jordan would be extremely helpful. For our part, we should emphasize

publicly, and on the record, our national interest in Jordan's stability and our rejection of actions by any party that could compromise that stability.

17. (C) Prime Minister Sharon will be visiting Washington in the near future. We hope that an appropriate opportunity can be found to raise this issue with him.

GNEHM